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# **Language characterology and textual dynamics: a crosslinguistic exploration in English and Scottish Gaelic.**

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## ABSTRACT

In the present paper we bring together concepts from the Prague School (Daneš 1974; Firbas 1992) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday 1967; Halliday and Matthiessen 2014; Fries 1984, 1991) to compare the means by which cohesion and information structure are signalled in English and Scottish Gaelic. We start with a brief discussion of textuality across languages and question the universality of Halliday's concept of Theme. From there we present a contrastive overview of textuality in the two languages, in which we characterise English as participant-oriented and Gaelic as process-oriented. We then provide a detailed analysis of the range of ways in which the distinct resources of each language combine to structure the flow of a narrative text in its English and Gaelic versions, as translated by the author (MacDonald 2009). In this way we demonstrate: (i) how the form and function of the textual resources available in each language can be related to their distinctive characterologies; (ii) how these individual resources function differently within the two texts; and (iii) how the distinct functions realised at the clausal level nonetheless interact to fulfil broadly equivalent functions in terms of the semantic relations indexed between consecutive stretches of text above the clause. Building on these findings, we suggest more general points regarding the appropriate units of analysis in (crosslinguistic) discourse analysis and typology and the level of abstraction of linguistic universals.

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## 1. Introduction

A text is more than a series of propositions in a logical sequence. The English term *text* is derived from the Latin verb *texere* ‘to weave’ and implies the integration of individual propositions, or clauses, into a larger pattern. More specifically, creating a coherent and user-friendly text involves balancing the continuity and development of the subject matter and indexing the contribution of each new proposition in relation to those around it accordingly. We can refer to this property of linguistic output as *textuality* and to the various linguistic tools that have evolved at the service of textuality within a specific language as the *textual resources* of that language.

According to Halliday, the existence of such specifically textual resources is one of the few universals of language, with similarly abstract universals being the specifically experiential and interpersonal resources, functioning respectively to represent experience in terms of people, things, actions and states and to enact dialogue between speakers and hearers in terms of turn-taking, claims to authority and the expression of attitudes. These three categories of resources are referred to as the textual, experiential<sup>1</sup> and interpersonal metafunctions (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 30-31) and, taken together, they represent the different communicative needs that languages universally fulfil in their role as social semiotic systems (Halliday 1978). However, the specific structural resources that individual languages have developed to meet the communicative demands within each metafunction are not assumed to be universal. Rather, in the process of language evolution, or *linguistic phylogenesis*, the form and function of pre-existing features will affect the way in which later features develop, while these in turn may have feedback effects on existing features. In this way grammars are said to be *emergent* (Hopper 1987), and the non-arbitrary and symbiotic relationship between

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<sup>1</sup> Halliday includes both experiential and logical meanings within the ideational metafunction. For reasons of clarity and present relevance we refer specifically to the experiential component in this paper.

the emerging features of each specific language is referred to as the *characterology* (Mathesius 1964) of that language.

Such a perspective on language evolution is captured in Halliday's (1978: 4) oft-quoted maxim that "language is as it is because of the functions it has evolved to serve in people's lives"<sup>2</sup>. We can complement this with the converse perspective that *speakers will communicate according to the potential made available to them by the language in its current state of development*. This is the *logogenetic* perspective of synchronic text production, characterised by Beckner *et al.* (2009: 10-11) by summarizing Talmy (2000) and Berman and Slobin (1994), respectively:

[C]onstructions as conventionalized linguistic means for presenting different construals of an event, structure concepts and window attention to aspects of experience through the options that specific languages make available to speakers (Talmy 2000).

Crosslinguistic research shows how different languages lead speakers to prioritize different aspects of events in narrative discourse (Berman & Slobin 1994)<sup>3</sup>.

Combining the phylogenetic and logogenetic perspectives, in the present paper we compare and contrast the use of textual resources in two languages, English and Scottish Gaelic, as they unfold across a narrative discourse that was originally written in English and subsequently translated into Gaelic by the author herself – or "rewritten in Gaelic", as she puts it (MacDonald 2009:70). In this way we will demonstrate: (i) how the form and function

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<sup>2</sup> Within SFL such a perspective often gives rise to synchronic descriptions of language, as if language ever stood still or could be generalised to a sufficient degree of abstraction to account for whole populations of speakers. Such descriptions should therefore be taken as no more than heuristic artifices, attempts to model the nature of the continually emergent systems of relations that mutually reinforce each other and so determine the characterological profile of each specific language.

<sup>3</sup> While Beckner *et al.* continue that "the conceptual patterns derived from the L1 shape the way that constructions are put together, leading to non-native categorization and 'thinking for speaking' (Slobin 1996)" (2009: 11), we do not adhere to the view that conceptualisation and linguistic representation are separate concepts but rather a single act of *construal*. Nonetheless, we follow the line of reasoning that the structures of a language will affect the way a speaker construes events in ongoing text production.

of the different textual resources available in the two languages can be related to their distinctive characterologies; (ii) how the textual resources of each language function differently within the analysed text in terms of the lexicogrammatical work being done at the clausal or inter-clausal level; and (iii) how the different lexicogrammatical functions fulfilled at the clausal level within each of the two languages nonetheless interact to fulfil broadly equivalent functions in terms of the semantic relations indexed between consecutive stretches of text above the clause. Building on these findings, the paper suggests more general points regarding the appropriate units of analysis in (crosslinguistic) discourse analysis and typology and the level of abstraction of linguistic universals.

In order to compare the textuality of the two texts referred to above, however, it is first necessary to refine what we mean by textuality as a concept and to consider what exactly it is we are comparing and at what level of abstraction texts in different languages are indeed comparable.

## **2. Questioning our textuality**

Chafe (1976: 28) offers the idea of *packaging* as a handy and user-friendly working metaphor for textuality in its various manifestations. As he explains:

I have been using the term *packaging* to refer to the kind of phenomena at issue here, with the idea that they have to do primarily with how the message is sent and only secondarily with the message itself, just as the packaging of toothpaste can affect sales in partial independence of the quality of the toothpaste inside.

In other words, and in line with Halliday's (1975: 36) concept of the relative independence of the three metafunctions, there is a level of organisation in language that deals with the presentation of the clause over and above its experiential content as a proposition and its interpersonal meanings as a speech act. And, as stated above, the existence of such

organisational capacity is considered by Halliday to be a universal feature of language (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 30-31). However, Halliday makes no such claim of universality for the specific mechanisms through which this packaging is achieved, which raises some significant issues for cross-linguistic typology.

Starting with the perspective from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the fundamental concept is that the clause as message has a Theme/Rheme structure in which the Theme comprises those elements that serve specifically to relate the clause to its cotext<sup>4</sup>. For Halliday (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 88-89; Halliday 1970: 357-359) the Theme in English comprises everything in the clause up to the first experiential element (participant, process or circumstance). This element is the topical Theme, and is an obligatory element of all unellipted major clauses, with everything preceding the topical Theme being either an interpersonal or textual Theme. While the exact nature of both the structure and function varies across languages, there seems to be an implicit consensus in the SFL literature that, at some abstract level, Theme is a universal structural-functional category (though this idea is not inherent in the theory). However, the conceptualisation of Theme even at an abstract level has been the matter of some debate, with a notable shift in emphasis between the different editions of *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (IFG), the core text within SFL. (For further discussion of this development see Arús Hita [2007], O’Grady [2017] and Bartlett [2016]).

In the first edition of IFG, Halliday (1985: 39) defines Theme as: “the element which serves as the point of departure of the message [...] that with which the clause is concerned.” As can be seen, this definition brings together two concepts that are not necessarily equivalent: the idea of point of departure (POD) and the idea of ‘aboutness’. The second of these, despite its obvious relevance to textuality and its resonance with the concept of ‘topic’ from other

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<sup>4</sup> And in some cases, as with a vocative as an interpersonal Theme, to its material context.



traditions, is, however, dropped in later definitions, such as the following from IFG4 (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 89<sup>5</sup>):

The Theme is the element that serves as the point of departure for the message; it is that which locates and orients the clause within its context. The speaker chooses the Theme as his or her point of departure to guide the addressee in developing an interpretation of the message; by making part of the message prominent as Theme, the speaker enables the addressee to process the message.

This later definition restricts the function of Theme to that of an orienting device and nothing more is said of ‘aboutness’. This perhaps reflects the difficulty in limiting aboutness to a single concept, particularly one that is overtly indexed, as illustrated in the following invented example:

(1) When my wife last saw John, a dog had just bitten him.

At one level, his clause complex is clearly ‘about’ John, the common referent in the two clauses, yet John is Theme in neither of the two individual clauses. Difficulties such as these have led to the abandonment of *topic* as a structural element within Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG), an approach sharing a number of the functional perspectives of SFL.

However, taking the later SFL perspective and restricting the function of Theme to that of POD as an orienting device overcomes this problem and redirects our attention as analysts to considerations of when and why ‘topical referents’ are included in the POD and what other positions they may occupy. This allows us to explore the inherent tension in textuality between local and global organisation, between the work of Theme in orienting a clause to its immediate environment and/or to larger units of text. In this way, we can think of distinctions between a *clausal topic* and a *discourse topic*, which need not be the same element, and we

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<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that this ‘later’ development is closer to the formulation in Halliday (1970: 357), as noted by Kristin Davidse (*pers. comm.*).

can make a distinction within the general category of textuality as an output<sup>6</sup> between *textualisation* as the clause-by-clause process of creating textuality and *texture* as the structural cohesion across the final global product. We will return to these distinctions below. At this point it is necessary to add to the mix another approach to textuality and the concept of *téma* from the Prague School. Originating with Mathesius (1983a [1927]; 1983b [1929]) and developed in the work of Daneš (1974) and Firbas (1992), *téma* refers to the element of the clause with the “least communicative dynamism” (LCD) – that is to say, roughly, the element that provides least new information to the clause<sup>7</sup>. How this is calculated depends on the interaction of prosody, syntax, semantics and context dependence (see Firbas 1992 and O’Grady 2016). It is important to point out here, however, that there is a significant difference between *téma* as the LCD element and Theme as a structurally salient element, despite the fact that Halliday cites the Prague School as the basis of his ideas. For example, in the following invented clause, the Theme in SFL terms is ‘a boy’ while *téma* is ‘her’.

(2) A boy bought her the yellow book.

At the level of clause this may be a minor problem, but at the textual level a major clash is introduced in that Daneš’s (1974) ideas on *thematic progression* between clauses is based on the relationship between the *téma* in consecutive clauses while Fries’s (1981, 1994) adoption and development of Daneš’s work as *method of development* is based on the progression of Hallidayan Themes across a text. Given the very different nature of *téma* and Theme at clause level, this means either that Daneš’s and Fries’s elaborations at the textual level are contradictory or that they capture different and complementary aspects of textuality. We will return to this point below.

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<sup>6</sup> A term chosen to be neutral in terms of process and product.

<sup>7</sup> *Téma* is only one of the concepts developed by Mathesius. It is introduced here as it offers a perspective that is lacking in the SFL approach, while Mathesius’s other terms have very close equivalents in SFL.

The distinction between the Prague concept of *téma* and its reconceptualisation in Halliday's category of Theme leads us to another important aspect of textuality and the question of whether we have a single complex relationship in the form of a cline, as in communicative dynamism, or whether there are distinct systemic oppositions in play: specifically, between Theme and Rheme in terms of orientation, and between focal and background information in terms of informational salience. There is a variety of terminology for the latter distinction, which is based on tonic prominence, with Given and New being the terms used a little misleadingly in SFL, given that Given does not necessarily mean previously introduced and New does not necessarily mean non-recoverable (see O'Grady [2016], Berry [2019] for further discussions). In this paper we adopt Halliday's terminology and distinguish between Theme and Rheme as elements of thematicity and Given and New as elements of information structure (IS), with textuality as a more general category covering both. However, whether a *splitting* or a *combining* approach (Fries 1981) is adopted, the important point for the purposes of this paper is that textuality is not a function of orientation alone, with the corollary that the method of development of a text is unlikely to be discerned purely through an examination of Themes as is the norm in SFL discourse analytical work.

Following on from this, it is important to note that the full range of lexicogrammatical resources is brought to bear in creating textuality across languages: syntax (e.g. clause initial position of Theme); lexis (e.g. pronouns as (con)textually recoverable referents); and intonation (e.g. tonic prominence of New). And, to pick up on the underlying premise of the paper, the way that individual languages employ these resources is a function of the general characterology of each language. In a paper comparing English, Catalan and various Germanic languages, Vallduví and Engdahl (1996) demonstrate the contrasting repercussions on textual organisation and the variety of constructions stemming from the character of English as a syntactically relatively rigid language with free-floating tonic prominence and

the character of Catalan as a syntactically loose language with fixed tonic prominence on the final element of the clause nucleus.

While Vallduví and Engdahl's (1996) study is important in demonstrating the effects of a language's general characterology on the textual organisation of clauses, their paper, as with much work on information structure, is limited to a consideration of the propositional content of clauses in terms of the hypothetical questions they answer (see Hasan and Fries [1995: xxix] for a similar critique). This idea is illustrated in the following pair of examples from Vallduví and Engdahl (1996: 463):

(3) What about the pipes? What's wrong with them? – The pipes are **rusty**.

(4) Why does the water from the tap come out brown? – The **pipes** are rusty.

From a more general perspective on textuality, and in particular one that goes beyond clausal or inter-clausal semantics to consider larger units of text, our analysis should not be limited to asking “What questions does this structure answer?” but should also consider “In what directions is this structure pushing the text?”.

This was the position in a previous paper (Bartlett 2016), in which the first author considered the problems posed by the different characterologies of Gaelic and English for the general tendencies in SFL referred to above (i) to equate Theme with the first experiential element in the absence of overt morphological marking; and (ii) to analyse the method of development of a text on the basis of Theme so identified.

More specifically, the paper makes a broad distinction between the characterology of Gaelic as a process-oriented language and English as a participant-oriented language (see also Tomasello [2003: 45-46] on “noun-friendly” and “verb-friendly” languages). The underlying logic of this distinction is that the clause in Gaelic construes an event as a process taking place that involves one or more participants while the clause in English construes an event as

a specific participant undertaking an activity that may include other participants<sup>8</sup>. Various grammatical arguments were produced to support this distinction<sup>9</sup>, the most basic of which was Gaelic's highly rigid verb initial structure<sup>10</sup> and the 'canonical' Subject-initial structure of the English clause. One important consequence of this discussion was the idea that the participant-orientation of English and the Subject-initial structure of the canonical clause meant that the two faces of Theme, as "that with which the clause is concerned" and as the orienting point of departure, are generally conflated within the single *language specific* or *emic* feature of Theme in English. However, the same cannot be expected of other languages. This fundamental difference in characterology between the two languages presents problems for the concept of Theme, and in particular for the analysis of method of development based on Theme alone. This was illustrated in Bartlett (2016) through an analysis of examples from MacDonald's (2009) original English text and her translation of this into Scottish Gaelic. Predictably, this demonstrated that an analysis of Theme as the first experiential element could in no way be parallel to the English version of the text which would suggest that the two texts, despite being an original and a translation by the same author, displayed radically different methods of development. However, from here Bartlett (2016) developed the idea that the unmarked Theme as the POD of a clause could be equated with the orientation of the text in both time and space and so was better seen as a *thematic element* including both nominal and verbal elements - the first experiential elements in English and Gaelic respectively. In this way, the two languages could be said to afford different relative

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<sup>8</sup> This more or less corresponds to the distinction between *categorical judgments*, which are based on a subject-predicate articulation, and *thetic judgments*, which "do not involve an act of predication about some 'psychological subject' but attribute something to a situation as a whole" (Haberland 2006: 676). The argument in this paper will be along the lines that Scottish Gaelic predominantly uses thetic judgments but that textual devices can be used to nudge the text towards categorical judgments where necessary.

<sup>9</sup> Such arguments include the use of the Finite (plus lexical verb) without the Subject in negotiations (see also below); the lack of indefinite pronouns functioning as Subjects; the focus on the process in passive-like constructions (see also below); and the absence of subject-raising in epistemic modality. See Bartlett (2016, forthcoming) for elaborations of these arguments.

<sup>10</sup> More accurately, Finite-initial (i.e. the finite element, rather than the lexical verb, is initial).

prominence to each element within the thematic element as a single structure. This conceptualisation, which was developed from Cloran's (e.g. 2010) work on Rhetorical Units (RUs) – explained in more detail below<sup>11</sup> – eliminated the vast majority of apparent discrepancies in textuality between the two texts, though it left a considerable number still to be accounted for. We will return to a discussion of these and what they might tell us about the contrasting characterologies of English and Gaelic once we have provided a bit more detail firstly about the grammar of Gaelic and secondly about Cloran's modelling of Rhetorical Units<sup>12</sup>.

### 3. Gaelic grammar – general characterology and textual resources

Gaelic is classified in traditional Greenberg-style linguistic terminology as a VSO language, but this characterisation misses two crucial points. Firstly, that it is not the lexical verb (or Predicator in SFL terminology) that comes first but the Finite element, which is often, though far from always, conflated with the Predicator. Thus we have<sup>13</sup>:

(5) *Dh'itheadh iad an t-iasg.*

eat.COND they DEF fish

'They would eat the fish.'<sup>14</sup>

(6) *Bha iad ag innse naidheachdean ...*

be.PST they at tell.VN news

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<sup>11</sup> The idea can also be related to alternative conceptions of Theme as extending beyond the first experiential element (e.g. Berry 1996).

<sup>12</sup> In this way we avoid the circularity implicit in much SFL work on Theme, in English and other languages, in which a single element of the clause is classified as Theme and a description of the method of development of a text is then produced on the basis of this element alone, without independent means of considering the ways in which the text develops. This description can then be used to justify the identification of the Theme in each clause, so completing the circle. In this paper we avoid such a circularity in that, while we recognise clause initial position as playing some role in the textual organisation of a clause, we do not relate this to a single function of Theme which we then analyse as the basis for the method of development of the text. Rather, we look at cases where the initial elements in the Gaelic and English texts differ significantly; consider the overall movement of the text(s) at that point; and then analyse in what way clause-initial position, in conjunction with other lexical and intonational features, contributes to signalling the shift thus identified in different ways for the two languages, each according to their general characterology.

<sup>13</sup> All spellings from cited sources are as in the original though they may be marked.

<sup>14</sup> Note that all glosses are simplified in terms of features that are not relevant to the present discussion. Thus, for example, all past forms will be glossed as PST irrespective of how they are formed.

‘They were telling news ...’

(MacDonald 2009: 27)

And secondly, there is very little evidence for a Subject according to its definition in SFL as the “modally responsible” argument, i.e. the nominal element that “play[s] an important role as (part of) the interactional nub” of the clause (Hasan and Fries 1995: xxiii-xxiv). In English this is primarily manifest through the inclusion of the Subject in elliptical clauses (including tags), whereas for Gaelic, as demonstrated in the extended example below (MacLean 2009: 18-19), only the Finite element is involved<sup>15</sup>:

(7) *Dh’fhainneachd e an robh mi deiseil ...*

ask.PST                    he INT be.PST I    ready

‘He asked if I was ready.’

*Thuir mi gu robh,*

say.PST I    COMP be.PST

‘I said I was.’

*Agus tha.*

and    be.PRS

‘And I am.’

*Uill, tha mi a’ smaoinichadh gu bheil.*

well be.PRS I    at think.VN                    COMP be.PRS

‘Well, I think I am.’

From this we can derive the idea that the first nominal element in the canonical Gaelic clause has some thematic prominence, though, following the idea set out in the previous section, to a

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<sup>15</sup> The degree to which Gaelic may have what is classified as a Primary Syntactic Element (PSE) demonstrating a number of associated features is a question waiting to be answered. It is important to note here that only in a very few cases in modern Gaelic, i.e. the first singular and first plural conditionals and the first plural imperative, is the Subject signalled by a verbal inflection.

lesser degree than the Finite and any conflated Predicators. For present purposes we will refer to this position as realising “minor Theme”.

The idea that the Finite/Predicator receives greater thematic prominence than the participants is further illustrated in the periphrastic passive form with RACH ‘go’ + the verbal noun<sup>16</sup> of the Predicator, the most common of four passive-like constructions. This construction is of specific interest as there is a contrast between examples with a full nominal group, which appear in the canonical position after the Finite of RACH, and those with a pronominal form, which appear as possessive adjectives modifying the Predicator as a verbal noun. Hence, in the latter case it is the Predicator itself which occupies the post-Finite position of minor Theme, while the textual status of the pronoun is that of *téma* or least dynamic element.

These ideas are illustrated in examples (8) and (9):

- (8) *Chaidh an litir a sgrìobhadh an.dè.*

go.PST DEF letter its write.VN yesterday<sup>17</sup>

‘The letter was written yesterday.’

- (9) *Chaidh mo bhualadh.*

go.PST my strike.VN

‘I was struck.’

In terms of information structure, we would tentatively characterise Gaelic as having at least a very strong tendency to maintain the tonic stress on the last full element of the clause (i.e. not including clitic pronouns, but potentially including each element in a coordinated structure). Importantly, as we shall see below, this applies to the initial element of ‘cleft clauses’, as in (10):

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<sup>16</sup> See Ronan (2012) for a discussion of the verbal noun in Celtic languages.

<sup>17</sup> There are alternative constructions here. In some grammars *a* is a non-declining agreement particle, not a possessive pronoun as suggested here. In a small sample with native speakers I carried out in response to feedback from an anonymous reviewer the usage was fluid and dependent on facts such as the number and animacy of the patient as well as the gender. This is an area where corpus research of naturally occurring data is much needed.



- (10) *Bu mhise a sgrìobh i.*

COP.PST I.EMPH REL write.PST it

‘It was **me** that wrote it.’

According to Vallduví and Engdahl (1996: 476ff), the clause-final placement of the tonic is strictly the case for Catalan, which has a canonical VOS order but which uses pronominalisation and extraposition to remove non-focal elements from the clause and so enable the tonic stress to fall on alternative elements. This is shown in the following modified examples from Vallduví and Engdahl (1996:479), starting with the canonical form (which they label “all-focus” but which would be labelled “all-New” in the Hallidayan tradition):

- (11) *Se=’n=va anar el Joan.*

3SG.REFL=LOC=3SG.PST:leave DEF.M John

‘**John** left.’

- (12) *Él se=’n=va anar.*

he 3SG.REFL=LOC=3SG.PST:leave

‘**He** left.’

- (13) *Se=’n=va anar, el Joan.*

3SG.REFL=LOC=3SG.PST:leave DEF.M John

‘**John** left.’

- (14) *El Joan, se=’n=va anar.*

DEF.M John 3SG.REFL=LOC=3SG.PST:leave

‘**John** left.’

However, unlike Catalan, Gaelic has a strong tendency to stick to the canonical VSO structure, even to the extent of avoiding nominal extraposition and absolute Themes (i.e. those which coindex rather than replace an element of the experiential structure of the

clause)<sup>18</sup>. Gaelic does, however, make great use of predicated Themes (or what are generally called ‘clefts’ in more formal traditions), as these substructures in themselves simultaneously follow the canonical Finite^Participant<sup>19</sup> structure and allow the tonic to fall ‘naturally’ on the participant as the final element (cf. Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 123; Halliday 1967: 236)<sup>20</sup>. Note that Gaelic has a distinct copular verb for ‘to be’ in identifying processes, IS in the present and BU in the past, as compared with THA and BHA for attributive relational processes. The copular is the form used for predicated Themes, as in the much parodied ‘Tis/’Twas forms in Irish and Highland English. We shall use ‘Tis/’Twas in glosses to distinguish identifying from attributive structures. Note that in the following example the English sentences could also employ a predicated Theme; the point being made is that this is the unmarked form for the Gaelic examples:

(15) *B’ e mo bhràthair a dh’ith an t-ubhal.*

COP.PST it my brother REL eat.PST DEF apple

‘My **brother** ate the apple.’

The structure is also used to distinguish between the broad focus of all-New constructions, as in (16), and a narrow focus on the final element of the nucleus, as in (17).

(16) *Dh’ith mo bhràthair an t-ubhal.*

eat.PST my brother DEF apple

‘My brother ate the **apple**.’

(17) *B’ e an t-ubhal a dh’ith mo bhràthair.*

COP.PST it DEF apple REL eat.PST my brother

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<sup>18</sup> Corpus-based research into patterns of extraposition and detachment in spoken language is much needed here also.

<sup>19</sup> The caret symbol (^) is used to signal compulsory word order in SFL.

<sup>20</sup> In *Notes on Transitivity and Theme 2* (1967:236), Halliday discusses the clause *It’s John who broke the window* in terms of predicated Theme: “Structurally predication maps the function of identifier on to that of theme, giving explicit prominence to the theme by exclusion: ‘John and nobody else’ is under consideration’ ... Since thematic prominence is a form of new information, the predicated element carries the unmarked information focus.” Compare this with Gaelic example (10) and (15).

‘My brother ate the **apple**.’ (or possibly, though rather less likely, ‘The **apple** ate my brother’).

A slightly modified form of the copula construction, with the pronominal form ANN, can be used to thematise predicative adjectives (18), circumstantial Adjuncts (19), Predicators (20) and even entire finite clauses (the second clause in [21]) (Byrne 2002: 89-96):

- (18) 'S        *ann dearg a tha an t-ubhal.*

COP.PRS PRO red     REL be.PRS DEF apple

‘The apple is **red**.’

- (19) 'S        *ann an-diugh fhèin a fhuair mi e.*

COP.PRS PRO today     REFL REL get.PST I it

‘I got it **today**.’

- (20) 'S        *ann a' cluich 's a' snàmh a*

COP.PRS PRO at play.VN and at swim.VN REL

*bhios sinn fad an latha.*

be.FUT we length DEF day.GEN

‘We will be **playing** and **swimming** all the day.’

- (21) *Bha dùil agam a-dhol a-mach a-raoir, ach*

be.PST expectation at.me go.INF out last.night but

*'s ann a dh'fhuirich mi a-staigh.*

COP.PRS PRO.EXIST REL stay.PST I in

‘I was expecting to go out last night but (in the end) I stayed **in**.’

Fairly often, especially in the spoken language, the copula itself can be dropped with the predicated Theme remaining in preposed position, as we can see in the following example.

- (22) *Duine caol, tana a bha ann am Fionnlaigh.*

man slender thin REL be.PST in Finlay

‘Finlay was a **slender, thin** man.’

We will now briefly present Rhetorical Units before moving on to the comparative analysis of the two texts.

#### **4. Rhetorical Units: an overview and expansion.**

It was suggested above that Rhetorical Units (RUs) as cohesively linked stretches of text with different spatiotemporal orientations are a useful way to account for the majority of apparent discrepancies in thematic analysis between Gaelic as a process-oriented and Finite-initial language and English as a participant-oriented and Subject-initial language. This is because the categorisation of RUs is based on a combination of nominal (spatial) and verbal (temporal) elements, in contrast to a thematic analysis based on the first experiential element alone. Nonetheless, and equally as importantly, in providing this spatiotemporal frame, RU analysis does not bleach the important differences in textual progression that result from the different characterologies of the two languages.

In this section we will outline Cloran’s original concept of Rhetorical Units (see Cloran [2010] for the most recent overview) and propose some extensions of our own. We will finish with a summary of the advantages of adopting this approach to textual progression, not only for textual analysis – comparative or otherwise – but also for the lexicogrammatical description of individual languages (including English) from a functional perspective.

RUs are semantic units, realised by a combination of lexicogrammatical items that operate beyond the clause (though they are perhaps coterminous with a clause) and below the text (though they are perhaps coterminous with a text). As features of the textual metafunction, RUs index relations within text and between text and context. In terms of context, RUs signal the spatiotemporal relationship between the text itself and the referents within it. Thus, RUs orient the text in space and time or, from the complementary perspective, RUs index what spatiotemporal contexts are being *made relevant* by the speaker for the current purposes of

the discourse (Hasan 1999). Different RUs are thus said to have distinct rhetorical functions. In terms of cotection, RUs signal cohesive relationships of different kinds between the stretches of text they delimit.

A single Rhetorical Unit is therefore identified, in Cloran's framework, as a stretch of language having a continuity of reference with respect to the semantic categories of Central Entity (CE) and Event Orientation (EO). The CE is realised lexicogrammatically in English as the Subject of the clause while the EO refers to the temporality and modality of the message, most often signalled in English through the Finite element of the verbal group. Between them, these features, as the name suggests, define the rhetorical function of the message independently of experiential features. So, for example, in (23), "my brother", as CE, denotes a specific but non-present referent, while the EO is habitual, a combination of spatial and temporal deixis which is classified as (part of) an Account<sup>21</sup> RU (see Cloran [2010] for a full classification of RUs):

(23) My brother doesn't eat eggs.

In (24), in comparison, the CE is a copresent interactant and the EO is concurrent, a combination which is classified as (part of) a Commentary RU:

(24) I am standing here before you today ...

The combination of a category CE and present simple EO realises (part of) a Generalisation, as in (25):

(25) Penguins don't eat kangaroos.

And in (26) the past marking realises (part of) a Recount RU:

(26) These events led to terrible destruction.

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<sup>21</sup> As with all SFL terms the capital letter suggests that the metalanguage is designed to reflect normal usage but nonetheless has its own specific meaning in the theory.

It is worth pointing out at this point that Cloran's classification grew out of discourse analytical work and comprises those categories that have been deemed useful and sufficient for the purposes of the projects undertaken. This does not preclude further categorisation, such as distinguishing between past actions (Recounts) in terms of their spatial orientation, i.e. the location and generalisability of the CEs.

As stated above, RUs are said to extend as long as the CE/EO conjunct remains constant. So, the stretch of text in Figure 1 represents two RUs, as shown by the boxing.

[Figure 1 near here]

Turning to the cotextual aspect of RUs and the cohesive ties between them, the two RUs in Figure 1 are said to display the structural relationship of *embedding* as semantic content from the first RU is picked up as "these events" in the opening Theme of the second RU (*cf.* Daneš's (1974) linear progression). It is suggested that in such cases the embedded RU fulfils some function within the matrix RU. With *expansions*, in contrast, the second RU is cohesively related to a preceding RU but has no function within it (Cloran 2010: 46).

Expansions are realised when the semantic content of the preceding text is taken up in the Rheme of the first message of the following RU, as with 'Spain' in Figure 2:

[Figure 2 near here]

This is labelled an expansion as, by use of this structure, the writer is now in a position to talk about artists rather than Spain itself. Note the different ways of boxing and numbering the RUs for embeddings and expansions, reflecting the structural-semantic relations between them.

Two more relationships can hold between sequential RUs. There may be discontinuous RUs, where an RU relates back to a stretch of text prior to the immediately preceding one; and

there may be cases where there is no link at all between an RU and preceding text, in which case, following Halliday and Hasan's (1976: 1-2) definition, we have a new text<sup>22</sup>.

RUs thus provide us with a semantic unit above the clause as message and they do so in a dynamic and incremental fashion, with units opening up the potential for what is to follow, rather than realising elements within larger hierarchical structures as with, say, Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST; Mann, Matthiessen and Thompson 1992), which seems better suited to the description of planned texts viewed post hoc as products.

Developing the notion of RUs, Bartlett (2016) suggested that, as well as signalling textual shifts in terms of the changing abstract qualities of the events and entities being represented, it would also be useful to mark shifts of reference within particular instances<sup>23</sup>. In this regard, Bartlett questioned Cloran's original label "Central Entity", on the grounds that such elements are categorised in terms of their abstract orientation, just as the events are. Bartlett therefore suggested Event Orientation and Entity Orientation for Cloran's original elements, with Central Event and Central Entity being used for specific referents. To avoid confusion, Cloran's original abbreviations were discarded and replaced with EvO (event orientation, Cloran's EO), EntO (entity orientation, Cloran's CE), CEv (central event, an additional category) and CEnt (central entity, not as per Cloran, but an additional category). A suggestion not made in Bartlett (2016) but following logically from this reclassification is that a shift in CEnt can be considered a new RU (or at least a sub-RU). Given the general tendency for processes to change much more rapidly than participants, the desirability of designating shifts in CEv as sub-RUs of some kind remains moot at this point.

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<sup>22</sup> There are cases, however, where individual messages may show no overt relation to preceding RUs but where these are serving as preambles, fillers or such like before the text continues in a cohesive fashion (see Bartlett 2016: 159-160).

<sup>23</sup> Such operations remain within the textual metafunction as they relate to the textual movement rather than the change in experiential properties of the different events and entities *per se*.

We suggest one further modification to Cloran's RU classification, this time with regard to the analysis of cohesive links rather than to the classification of RU type. Given that information structure and the placement of tonic prominence are an essential element of the textual metafunction along with thematicity, it seems appropriate to consider information structure within the analysis. This will allow us to distinguish between, and so account for, shifts in orientation in which the default conflation of Theme and Given remains in operation and those indexed by the marked conflation of Theme and New.

To summarise, the advantages of adopting an enhanced RU approach to textual progression are that:

- RUs provide a fuller spatiotemporal grounding than thematic analysis alone while allowing for different orientations between languages;
- as semantic units, RUs do not presuppose a specific form of lexicogrammatical realisation across languages. This opens up the possibility of considering *téma* (rather than or as well as Theme) as signalling method of development, even for English;
- as semantic units are more abstract than lexicogrammatical units, they are more comparable across languages. RUs therefore allow for greater cross-linguistic comparison, while not assuming full equivalence between semantic categories;
- RUs account for an analysis of textual progression at three distinct but interrelated levels: between clauses, between stretches of text and between levels of abstraction;
- RUs go beyond, but do not preclude, approaches to information structure based on propositional content and recoverability, providing further insights into different combinations of Given/New and Theme/Rheme.

We now turn to a discussion of the selection of the data set and the means of marking up examples for analysis.



## 5. Data set and identification of thematic (non-)equivalence

For the present paper we have taken as our data set all ranking clauses in Chapter 5 of *Còco is Crùbagan* (MacDonald 2009), the chapter from which the fragment analysed in Bartlett (2016) was taken. By ranking clauses we mean main clauses and finite subordinate and complement clauses, as these are all clauses which offer genuine choices in thematic structure. There is an audio recording of the Gaelic text, on which our analyses of tonic prominence are based, but not of the English original.

In the Gaelic version of the text there are 214 ranking clauses but only 167 in the original English. This discrepancy is to be accounted for mainly in terms of the common translation of English non-finite clauses and nominalisations by finite clauses and also through periphrasis, both of which may have thematic implications. Moreover, additional elements have been added in the Gaelic retelling of the story, particularly in the closing. There are also several elements that have been omitted in the Gaelic retelling, but these are significantly fewer. An example of both nominalisation and periphrasis occurs in (27) (clauses 92-94 in the Gaelic text):

- (27) *Ghnog Mamaidh an doras is dh'inns i gu*  
knock.PST Mammy DEF door and tell.PST she COMP  
*robh sinn air tighinn.*  
be.PST we on come.VN  
'Mammy announced our arrival at the door.'

Once the dual text had been classified into the two sets of ranking clauses we went through these to mark up the Finite and first participant (P1) in Gaelic and the Mood element (Subject and Finite) in English. The term *thematic element*, introduced above, will provisionally be used as an etic term to refer to these emic combinations. Any preceding features were analysed as textual, interpersonal or marked experiential Themes (Halliday and Matthiessen

2014: 99-100, 105), though these will not be discussed in this paper. Where the thematic elements corresponded between the two versions of the text, the two clauses were considered to be thematically equivalent (differences in thematic prominence between the process and the participant in the two languages notwithstanding). In addition, clauses were considered *near-equivalent* if minor variations in thematic structure could be accounted for either in terms of nominalisation/periphrasis, as above, or a rephrasing of events as in (28) and (29), where the original English version is in square brackets:

(28) *Nuair a bha an t-sìde math.*

when REL be.PST DEF weather good

‘when the weather was good’

[while the sun shone]

(29) *Bha srùban is feusgan is muirsgian ann.*

be.PST cockles and mussels and razorfish PRO.EXIST

‘There were cockles, mussels and razorfish.’

[The sands were also the home of cockles, mussels and razorfish.]

The former case is clearly a minor rewording while the second case involves a stylistic alteration rather than a lexicogrammatically motivated option (though textuality may play some part in motivating the stylistic choice, with the Gaelic picking up on *gainmheach*, sand, from two clauses earlier). Another case that we analysed as near-equivalents were transitivity structures where the canonical form entails converse thematisation between the two languages, such as (30):

(30) *Bha fios agam.*

be.PST knowledge at.me

‘Knowledge was at me.’

[I knew.]

A more complex example occurs in (31):

(31) *Chuir an t-àite-teine seo iongnadh mòr orm*

put.PST DEF fireplace this surprise big on.me

‘This fireplace put great surprise on me.’

[I was fascinated by the fireplace.]

As these differences are inscribed in the lexicogrammars of the two languages they can be considered straight translations not involving genuine choices in textuality within the process of text production, which is the focus of the current paper. However, they do add to the idea that Gaelic and English contrast in terms of participant and process orientation, and we would expect such differences to manifest themselves both phylogenetically and logogenetically. One further case that we decided not to count as textually divergent for the purposes of this paper is the use in Gaelic of the cleft for what can be analysed as mood Adjuncts, in that they relate to relative truth value rather than manner (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 184, 188-189). In such cases the structures following the cleft construction have a (roughly) equivalent thematic element in the two languages, as in examples (32)-(34):

(32) *Cha mhòr nach robh e a’ ruighinn*

COP.NEG big REL.NEG be.PST he at reach.VN

*mullach na taighe*

top DEF.F.GEN house.GEN

‘‘Tisn’t much that it wasn’t reaching the top of the house.’

[It ... nearly reached the ceiling.]

(33) *Cha b’ fhada gus an do laigh mo shùil orra*

NEG COP.PST long until INT PST lie my eye on.them

‘‘Twasn’t long until my eyes lay on it.’

[We soon fixed our eyes on what was stored in them.]<sup>24</sup>

(34) *Is gann gum b' urrainn dhomh*

COP.PRS scarce COMP.INT COP.PST able to.me

*feitheamh gu faicinn*

wait.INF PURP see.INF

‘‘Tis scarce that it was possible for us to wait and see.’

[We were extremely curious to find out.]

Again, however, it is worth noting that these examples demonstrate a less participant-oriented perspective in the Gaelic structures and the decision to count such clauses as equivalent could be questioned in future research. Note also that the last of these examples also includes another converse-transitivity structure, this time for dynamic modality, repeated as (35).

(35) *B' urrainn dhomh*

COP.PST able to.me

‘‘Twas possible to me’

[I could.]

Grouped together, the equivalent and near-equivalent clauses accounted for 188 (88%) of the total Gaelic clauses. These cases are not discussed further here, despite the fact that both cases present interesting features with respect to the different textualities of the two languages. For the purposes of this paper we will focus on those 26, or 12% of, Gaelic clauses that demonstrate a non-equivalent textual organisation where there was a genuine option to mirror the English structure.

We will finish this section with three brief notes on terminology. Firstly, as discussed above, there is no assumption that Theme is a universal category across languages nor, in those cases where such a function does exist, that it will equate to the first experiential element in the

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<sup>24</sup> The change from first person singular to plural is in the author’s own translation.

clause functioning as the point of departure for the message. Nonetheless, given that (i) there is a general agreement that clause-initial positioning is *in some way* textually significant; and (ii) that in the absence of overt morphological marking we have been assuming that clause initial positioning is the only viable index for Theme in Gaelic, then for the purposes of the present paper we shall refer to the first experiential element as Theme<sup>25</sup> and placement in such a position as thematisation. It will be clear that in this case Theme will refer to the SFL concept and not to the Prague School concept of *téma*. Secondly, given that, on the one hand, the term *topic* has been employed in a multitude of different ways in the literature and, on the other, that attempts to define and identify topical elements across clauses and stretches of text have produced varied and conflicting results, we shall use non-technical and periphrastic language in order to discuss the first appearance, continuation and resumption of referents and their relation to clause structure. In other words, rather than trying to identify elements such as *Given Topic* or *Resumed Topic*, we will rather say that a referent in a particular place in the clause structure has been picked up from prior context or freshly introduced, etc., and then discuss what this might mean for textual development. Thirdly, we will refer to phonologically stressed elements as tonic, so for instance ‘tonic Theme’, so as to avoid the presuppositions latent in Halliday’s term *New* along with deliberations of the scope of the New (or *focus*), which are not immediately relevant to the present paper.

## 6. Analysis of non-equivalent thematic structures

Of the 26 thematic structures demonstrating non-equivalence between the Gaelic and English versions of the text, 21 are copula structures, akin to predicated Themes in English, as discussed above, though far more versatile in their Gaelic manifestation, as will be explored

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<sup>25</sup> Strictly speaking, these are referred to as experiential or topical Themes, as opposed to interpersonal or textual Themes.

below. That the overwhelming majority of textually non-equivalent clauses are structured this way is hardly surprising given the absence of nominal extraposition as a potential textual mechanism in Gaelic and the Finite-initial structural constraint on the nucleus of the clause, constraints which between them render the finite cleft structure the natural candidate for thematically motivated extraposition. In this regard, it is worth pointing out that the ratio of 193:21 non-copular to copula structures is remarkably close to the 9:1 ratio posited by Halliday (2005: 48) for unmarked vs marked linguistic structures as a general feature of language. This would suggest that, as an available opposition within a system of alternations, the Gaelic copula structure is more akin to the category of marked Theme in English than to the English predicated Theme, of which latter category there are no examples in the text. We will cover the textual analysis in three parts, roughly corresponding to three clusters of non-equivalent structures that occur in clauses 4-9, 11-18 and 172-181 of the Gaelic text. The first cluster will be used to illustrate in more detail the general idea expounded above that Gaelic and English display different behaviour in terms of process-orientation and participant orientation respectively. However, while the analysis of these different orientations above was largely restricted to clause structure as a phylogenetic development, the textual analysis demonstrates the same principle occurring as a logogenetic process. As stated above, such continuities would be expected in discussing languages from a characterological perspective. The analysis of the second and third clusters will illustrate two distinct ways in which Gaelic utilises the copula structure, in conjunction with other lexicogrammatical features, in order to signal the equivalent categories of textual progression and cohesion as the radically different English structures in the English original.

#### *Gaelic Clauses 4-9: Process orientation*

In this short section we look at five instances of thematically non-equivalent constructions that occur in consecutive clauses within a single sentence very early on in the text. These five

instances fall into two types, with the examples in each case coordinated with ellipsis of the Finite. The two types are presented below on separate lines but as there is a redistribution of elements between the two versions, we present the complete English version in (38) only after the two Gaelic lines in (36) and (37), which are accompanied by an interlinear gloss and an idiomatic rendering in inverted commas, as usual. (For consistency, the English original in (38) is enclosed in square brackets.) Thematic elements are underlined for each language.

(36) Bha mòine ri buain, na caoraich

be.PST peat to.its harvest.VN DEF.PL sheep.PL

rin rùsgadh, obair-àitich ri deanamh

to.their shear.VN housework to.its do.VN

‘There was peat to be harvested, the sheep to be shorn, housework to be done.’

(37) Dh’feumte am buntàta a chur agus sealltainn

must.IMPERS.COND DEF potato put.INF and look.INF

ris na clèibh ghiomaich.

to DEF.PL creels lobster.GEN.PL

‘It was necessary to plant the potatoes and to attend to the lobster pots.’

(38) [We had to ... attend to crops, peat cutting and sheep shearing, as well as everyday tasks ... Pappy went lobster fishing ...]

In the first three Gaelic clauses there is an existential structure with a nominal group + reflexive process as existent. In terms of the thematic element, therefore, the central entities are “peat to be harvested”, “sheep to be shorn” and “housework to be done”, which all display a clear process-orientation in contrast to the ‘we’ of the English original.

This idea that the process rather than the participant is the focus is similarly clear in the last two clauses, where we have the impersonal conditional structure *dh’feumte* with no overt

Agent/Actor and with the activities of planting potatoes and attending to the creels as the central entities in the thematic element.

In this short stretch of text, the Gaelic represents a significant rewrite of the English, but the corresponding ideas are all still present and can be compared for the textual orientation of their presentation. And in all cases we see a significant difference, in that the English presents these five chores from a participant-oriented perspective – what ‘we’ had to do or what Pappy did – whereas the Gaelic presents the chores in impersonal structures that focus on the activities themselves, with no mention at all of ‘us’ or ‘Daddy’. This seems to be all the more significant given that the English version was the original text and so the extra information cannot be explained as a later clarification. Important to note in this regard is that in all cases the author has chosen to thematise the activity over the participant where a participant-oriented presentation equivalent to the English was not only possible in Gaelic but would have sounded in no way “out of place”. In other words, we have the same story told through distinct thematic progressions independently of lexicogrammatical constraints, and this raises its own questions about cross-linguistic comparisons and textuality as a culturally-contingent stylistic or registerial variable.

*Gaelic Clauses 11-18: Expansions.*

We now turn to a different set of non-equivalent Thematic structures and the use of copula constructions, which, while not demanded by cotextual features, are at least motivated by them. In the first example we have two consecutive copula constructions, which occur at the end of the first written paragraph and the beginning of the second in the Gaelic text. These examples follow hard on the heels of the stretch of text analysed above, in which the more arduous summer tasks were catalogued, with only a single transitional clause signalling a shift to more mundane tasks. Below we present the transitional clause along with the two clauses following, to be analysed in greater depth, and one further clause to show how the



text continues. As is often the case, there are some variations between the two versions but, in these instances, such variation does not affect the thematic analysis:

(39) *Bha seo cho math ris an obair àbhaisteach,*

be.PST this as well as DEF work usual

*a dol dhan bhùth is biadh a thoirt*

at go.VN to:DEF shop and food give:INF

*do dhaoine is chreutairean*

to people and creatures

‘This was as well as the usual tasks, going to the shops and feeding people and animals’

[As well as everyday tasks such as shopping.]

(40) *B’ e Mamaidh a bhiodh a’ sealtainn*

COP.PST it Mammy REL be.COND at look.VN

*as.dèidh na cuid seo dhan obair.*

after DEF.SG.F.GEN share.GEN this of:DEF work

‘It was Mammy who looked after that side of the work.’

[Mammy often planned shopping expeditions in the summer.]

(41) *B’ e deagh chothrom a bh’ ann*

COP.PST it excellent opportunity REL be.PST REL.EXIST

*do Mhamaidh falbh dhan bhùth agus faighinn*

to Mammy go.INF to:DEF shop and get.INF

*a-mach às an taigh le deagh shìde.*

out from DEF house with excellent weather

‘‘Twas a great opportunity for Mammy to go to the shop and to get out of the house with lovely weather.’

[It was a welcome break for Mammy to go shopping:]

(42) *Bhiodh i a' tadhal air daoine*

be.COND she at visit.VN on people

*a b' aithne dhi air an rathad.*

REL COP.PST acquaintance.to.her on DEF road

‘She would be visiting people she knew along the way.’

[it meant she could visit friends and socialise.]

Focusing on the copula clauses, we see in both cases that the same participant is included within the thematic element for both Gaelic and English, though there is a difference in the constructions used in the two languages in each case. The first of these is repeated below. Thematic elements are underlined and tonic elements are in bold for the Gaelic examples (there is no recording of the English text):

(43) *B' e Mamaidh a bhiodh a' sealltainn as dèidh na cuid seo dhan obair.*

– ‘Twas Mammy who would be looking after that share of the work.’

[Mammy often planned shopping expeditions in the summer.]

As can be seen, as well as the differences in the thematic elements between the two versions, there is also a rewrite involved. Despite these differences, however, the two versions display suitably similar characteristics in terms of textual development. The immediately preceding cotext in both cases refers to shopping (the anaphoric antecedent of “that share of the work” in the Gaelic and ‘shopping expeditions’ in the English), while the ‘summer’ of the English version also echoes the beginning of the paragraph. Both versions, therefore, display cotextual cohesion while shifting the text to what Mammy did. More specifically, what we see in both cases, in terms of the general progression of the text, is a movement of focus away from a catalogue of the general chores of the summer, which has served as an introductory framing, to the specific details of Mammy’s shopping expeditions, which will provide the

anecdotes for the rest of the chapter. In terms of RU structure, as outlined above, this would be considered an *expansion*. In the case of English, the shift from one RU to an expanding RU is realised through the presentation of a freshly introduced element as the Theme of the first clause of the new RU combined with the inclusion of a previously introduced element within the Rheme. This is a reversal of the usual trend to present old information in the Theme and fresh information in the Rheme. Unfortunately, as there is no English recording, we cannot further this analysis through a discussion of tonic placement.

As stated above, in the Gaelic text we have the same participant, Mammy, included within the thematic element of the clause. It is therefore necessary to account for the use of the copula structure in this instance when, from a purely clause-level lexicogrammatical point of view, the less-marked non-copula construction, as in the English, was a systemic option. In order to provide a plausible explanation for this, it is necessary to repeat the idea from Bartlett (2016), referenced above, that, even in cases where Gaelic and English show equivalence in terms of the thematic element as a unit, within that unit Gaelic has the Finite first as one manifestation of its process orientation while English has the Subject first as a manifestation of its contrasting participant orientation. From this it would make sense that, for English, the introduction of a new participant as Theme, potentially carrying tonic prominence, is sufficient indication of a shift in RU, without any need to introduce a marked syntactic structure. However, in the case of Gaelic, the unmarked Finite-initial structure would not signal the shift as effectively as the new focal element, *Mamaidh* in this instance, would not be the primary Theme. Moreover, as explained above, tonic stress in Gaelic is generally reserved for the final element in the nucleus of the clause, which would not be *Mamaidh* in this case. The use of the copula structure, therefore, serves to promote *Mamaidh* to primary Theme, while also enabling it to carry tonic prominence, and so more clearly indexes the shift in textual orientations as a new RU begins. This example, therefore, serves

to demonstrate how the textual devices of the two languages are differentially deployed in signalling a comparable shift in RUs, even where the same participant is included within the thematic elements of the two versions of the text<sup>26</sup>.

In (44), again reproduced from above, we see a very similar use of the copula construction as the focus moves from Mammy's shopping expeditions as a contrast to the other work on the croft, and onto the opportunities this gave her to see friends, an idea that is developed in the following clause, also included here:

- (44) *B' e deagh chothrom a bh' ann do Mhamaidh falbh dhan bhùth agus faighinn a-mach às an taigh le deagh shìde. Bhiodh i a 'tadhal air daoine a b' aithne dhi air an rathad.*  
 'Twas a great opportunity for Mammy to go to the shop and to get out of the house with lovely weather. She would be visiting people she knew along the way.'  
 [It was a welcome break for Mammy to go shopping: it meant she could visit friends and socialise.]

Here again we have an expansion signalled in Gaelic through the combination of a tonic Theme enabled through the copula construction. Note here, however, that the English version uses an extrapositional structure superficially similar in form to a predicated Theme to achieve the textual shift<sup>27</sup>. This would appear to be because the thematic element is an Attribute in a relational clause (i.e. a non-identifying Subject Complement) and these cannot be thematised as easily as other participants such as Actor or Sensor. Such constructions are not possible in Gaelic without the use of the copula, as discussed above.

<sup>26</sup> Haude (2018) makes a similar argument for Movima, a verb-initial language from Bolivia. Though taking a slightly more formalist perspective than ours, she argues that 'cleft' constructions are used to topicalise (or thematise, in our terms) participants rather than to focalise them, as suggested in most accounts. In words which fit well with the general perspective of this paper she concludes (2018:217) that "the pronominal construction [in Movima] challenges common definitions of clefts that link a particular structure to a prototypical function".

<sup>27</sup> Here we diverge from the standard IFG analysis in this case that the 'it' here is a dummy standing in for "to go shopping" as Theme.

Immediately following this we have another copula construction as the opportunities for Mammy to see friends are now further reconstrued through the eyes of the children, including the author:

(45) *B' e àm toilichte a bh' ann dhuinne*<sup>28</sup>

COP.PSTit time happy REL be.PST in.it to.us.EMPH

*cuideachd, oir bha sinn a' coinneachadh ri muinntir*

also as be.PST we at meet.VN to folk

*eile agus a' faicinn rudan ùra, agus bha seo na*

other and at see.VN thing.PL new.PL and be.PST this in.its

*ionnsachadh dhuinn.*

education to.us

‘‘Twas a happy time for us too, for we were meeting other people and seeing new things, and this was an education for us.’

[It was always exciting for us as well: we had an opportunity to widen our circle of friends and see new things. It was very much a voyage of discovery.]

Of particular interest in this last example is that the Gaelic closes with a *non-cleft* version of the experiential structure in the earlier examples: *bha seo na ionnsachadh dhuinn/that was an education for us*. The alternative structure with the predicated Theme *b’e ionnsachadh a bh’ann dhuinn/‘Twas an education that it was for us* would have been perfectly grammatical, but in this case the clause functions as a summary of the RU, with non-tonic Theme and tonic Rheme, rather than a topical switch and, as such, the copula structure is unnecessary.

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<sup>28</sup> Tonic stress on a nominal group as a whole would normally fall on the modifier as the final element. The placement of the tonic stress on the head, as indicated here, is either a slip from the author in reading the text, or else we have to allow for the tonic to be placed on either modifier or head in the final group structure of the clause rather than the final element *per se*. While the first option is the less convincing way out, I think it is quite likely here as there is an unusual pause between the two elements and the tonic makes less sense where placed.

After this flurry of non-equivalent thematic structures over the first fifteen clauses there is a marked lull, with only a further eight instance in the next 156 clauses before the next cluster. This thinning out of the copula structures coincides with a switch in rhetorical function from the introductory material that sets the tone of the chapter – the progressive narrowing of focus from the summertime chores to Mammy’s work and the reconstrual of her shopping trips as times of adventure for the children – and onto the anecdotal episodes as individual events. This could be taken to suggest that the copula construction as a thematic device is employed to realign the text, opening it up to new directions, rather than pushing the narrative forward directly. In other words, not all Themes are equal, but signal different degrees of shift and have scope over variable amounts of text (see also Bartlett 2016 and O’Grady & Bartlett 2019), an idea that will be developed in the following section in relation to the second cluster of copular structures.

Indeed, a quick scan of the whole book suggests that copula constructions occur more at the beginning of chapters and also at the beginning of paragraphs, which would back up this interpretation. There are seeming exceptions, as in the following example, which appears towards the end of the last of nine paragraphs describing the visit to Kirsty’s house and appears to be summing up the story. However, there are three clauses that follow this and which allow the author to reconstrue the visit as a treasured memory that has lasted throughout the years:

- (46) *B’ e ceilidh math a rinn sinn*  
 COP.PST it get-together good REL make.PST we  
*aig taigh Ciorstaidh, is bidh cuimhn’ agam air*  
 at house Kirsty.GEN and be:FUT memory at.me on.it  
*gu.brath. An dèidh iomadh bliadhna thill mi*  
 always after many year return.PST I

*air.ais chun na cagailte bhlàth aice is cha*

back to DEF.F.SG.GEN hearth.GEN warm at.her and NEG

*robh dad air atharrachadh.*

be.PST anything on change.VN

‘‘Tw’as a good get-together we had at Kirsty’s house and I will always remember it.

After many years I returned to her warm hearth and nothing had changed.’

[The visit to Kirsty’s house was a memorable one, and we returned many times to the warm kernel of her hearth, home and heart. I returned many years later to visit Kirsty for old times’ sake, and not one thing had changed.]

It is also noteworthy that none of the 17 clauses that comprise the last three paragraphs of the chapter use the copula construction, again suggesting this construction is used to introduce new directions rather than to close off existing avenues.

#### *Gaelic Clauses 172-181: Elaborations*

From the examples in the previous section it could be argued that the copula construction in Gaelic serves merely to allow tonic prominence on a freshly introduced Theme corresponding to the English construction and that there is very little more than this to account for in terms of different textual strategies as they relate to deeper and more wide-ranging differences in characterology between the two languages. However, the cluster of copula constructions in the extract below take us beyond such an account in that the fresh Theme indexed through the copula construction in Gaelic is not part of the thematic element in English.

(47) *Chùm sinn oirnn dhachaidh air monadh*

keep.PST we on.us home on moor

*is fraoch is cnuic is grobain*

and heather and hill.PL and bump.PL

‘We kept on home over moor and heather and hill and bumps’

[We tramped and trudged over many humps and bumps and hillocks,]

- (48) *gus an do ràinig sinn an ath thaigh.*

until INT PST reach.PST we DEF next house

‘till we reached the next house.’

[until it was time to stop at the next house.]

- (49) *B’ e taigh beag eile a bha seo*

COP.PST it house small other REL be.PST this

*air bàrr cnuic,*

on top hill.GEN

‘‘Twas another small house that this was, on top of a hill’

[this was another little cottage that stood high on a hill.]

- (50) *agus bha dà bhràthair a’ fuireach ann,*

and be.PST two brother at stay.VN in.it

*Ruairidh is Fionnlaigh.*

Roderick and Finlay.

‘and two brothers were living in it, Roderick and Finlay.’

[In it lived two bachelor brothers, Roderick and Finlay.]

- (51) *Cha robh iad idir coltach ri chèile.*

NEG be.PST theyat.all like each.other

‘They weren’t at all like each other.’

[They did not look at all alike.]

- (52) *Duine caol, tana a bh’ annam Fionnlaigh.*

Man slender thin REL be.PST in Finlay

‘A narrow, thin man was Finlay.’

[Finlay was lean and serious and had an air of sophistication about him.]



- (53) *Bha e air a dhreasaigeadh anna deise gorm,*  
 be.PST he on his dress.VN in suit blue  
*briogais, peitag is seacaid is lèine Kilmarnock.*  
 Trousers waistcoat and jacket and shirt Kilmarnock  
 ‘He was dressed in a blue suit, trousers, waistcoat and jacket, and a Kilmarnock shirt.’  
 [He was dressed in navy blue serge trousers, waistcoat to match, and a Kilmarnock shirt.]
- (54) *B’ e duine sgiobalta, stòlda a bh’ ann*  
 COP.PST it man agile serious REL be.PST in.him  
 ‘‘Twas an agile, serious man that he was’  
 [ ]
- (55) *agus, a.rèir.coltais a’ coimhead às.dèidh an taighe.*  
 and apparently at look.VN after DEF.M.SG.GEN house.GEN  
 ‘and apparently looking after the house.’  
 [He was obviously the one in charge of the household duties]
- (56) *Thòisich e sa mhionaid air deasachadh*  
 start.PST he in.DEF minute on prepare.VN  
*aoigheachd dhuinn.*  
 hospitality to.us  
 ‘He immediately started preparing hospitality for us.’  
 [and soon started preparations to offer us hospitality.]
- (57) *A’nis, b’ e duine cnagach tiugh*  
 now COP.PST it man bulky thick  
*a bh’ ann an Ruaraidh*  
 REL be.PST in DEF Roderick

‘Now, ’twas a bulky thickset man that Roderick was’

[Roderick, on the other hand, was short and sturdy ...]

(58) *agus bha esan a’ dèanamh obair a-muigh.*

and be.PST he.EMPH at do.VN work outside

‘And he was working outside’

[He was obviously responsible for the outdoor tasks.]

The first instance of non-equivalent Themes appears in (49). In the Gaelic clause we have the fresh idea “taigh beag eile” (another small house) as the predicated Theme and the anaphoric element as Rheme. However, the converse applies to the original English “this was another little cottage”. We see this exact contrast in patterning repeated for (52), (54) and (57).

Considering these clauses within their contextual environment we can see that they fulfil a different type of rhetorical move from the *expansions* analysed in the section above. In the present examples we see a rhetorical shift from a past event to a past description<sup>29</sup>. As stated above, in the English version the previously mentioned referent, “the next house”, is picked up in the Theme of the initial clause of the new RU. Structurally, therefore, this move is not an expansion, as in the examples in the previous section, but is rather the opening of an *embedded* RU which functions to elaborate on a previous referent. Turning to the Gaelic clauses, we have the same functional relationship of elaboration, but this is realised through a different structural configuration from the English, with the elaborating element as a predicated Theme and the elaborated element in the Rheme. What distinguishes expansions and embeddings in Gaelic, therefore, is not the movement (or not) of participants from Theme to Rheme, as in English, but the function of the thematic element: in the case of expansion, the thematised element is a participant; while for embeddings, it is an attribute<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Both would be Recounts in Cloran’s 2010 under-differentiated RU schema.

<sup>30</sup> Clearly, however, the data analysed have presented only a limited number of instances and these exemplify only a few of the possible variables with regard to the nature of the participant and process types that may be involved in rhetorical shifts.

In both cases the use of the copula construction allows the thematised element to receive tonic prominence. This may, however, be overridden for functional reasons. For example, while the stress in clause 54 is on the fresh elaborating information, as predicted, in (52) and (57) it is on the anaphoric referent in each case. However, as these are contrastive elements derived from a common Theme (in clause 50) this is easily accounted for. And even in these cases the use of the dual structure inherent in the predicated Theme allows the attributes in each case to receive a degree of tonic prominence. The tonic placement in (49) remains difficult to explain. To say that the clause is contrasting the present house with the one just visited would be a possible explanation, but this seems weak as the experiential content of the clause is limited to expressing the similarity rather than any contrast between the two.

## **7. Concluding discussion**

In the analyses above we have shown that the lexicogrammatical resources of both Gaelic and English can be said to include an element functioning as Theme, in other words they manipulate the salient properties of clause-initial position to signal a Point of Departure for each message. However, neither the function of this element nor its structural properties are identical between the two languages. In terms of form we have seen two areas of divergence: (i) in the canonical clause, Gaelic will thematise the Finite, potentially conflated with the Predicator, whereas English thematises a specific participant; and (ii) the predicated Theme is used more frequently in Gaelic than in English. In terms of function, the most significant difference would appear to be that whereas English overwhelmingly uses Theme to signal the continuation or switch of participant focus, Gaelic varies things, thematising fresh participants in the case of rhetorical expansions but thematising attributes in the case of embedded elaborations. Linking form and function, we see that in both cases, at least in the examples analysed here, Gaelic uses the predicated Theme whereas English uses unmarked

Theme. This can be explained in terms of a more general characterology for each language. As a participant-oriented language with canonical Subject-initial structure, English maintains its focus on the participants, whether these are constant or changing, through its tendency to conflate Subject with Theme and predicate with Rheme. Gaelic, on the other hand, as a process-oriented language with canonical Finite/Predicator-initial structure, is more likely to thematise information from the predicate, including attributes. As in English, these are likely to receive tonic prominence to index their fresh status but, owing to their clause initial placement and Gaelic's strong constraints on tonic placement, a predicated Theme is employed to 'naturalise' the tonicity of the clause. In such cases participant tracking is not a formally indexed feature of Gaelic text; rather, continuing referents are identifiable through the bundle of interacting features that mark out the *téma*. When, on the other hand, a participant is selected for thematic focus in Gaelic – as in (49), when there is a significant shift in the direction of the text – then there is recourse to the marked copula or cleft structure to enable the extraposition and subsequent tonic prominence of the first participant. An important point to be drawn from this is that the participant-focus of English and the canonical Subject-initial ordering creates a tendency for a highly topical element to be included in the Theme and this may be the root cause for the confusion between Theme as point of departure and Theme as that which the clause is about. It therefore means that, for English, tracking Themes across a text is a viable approach to identifying the Method of Development. As should be clear from the arguments so far, this is a language-specific situation which should not be generalised to languages other than English where a topical element may simply be the unmarked *téma*.

Returning to a distinction made in Bartlett (2016), we can say that, as a result of these different characterologies, English tends to focus on the *texture* aspect of textuality, in that formalised participant-tracking attends to the shifting focuses of the text as a whole product

(the global work referred to above), whereas Gaelic tends to focus on *textualisation* as the more localised process of indexing cohesive links from clause to clause. Importantly, however, both languages have the resources to attend to each of these aspects. As the analyses above have demonstrated, each of the two languages is able to combine the lexicogrammatical resources at their disposal in order to mark semantic features such as rhetorical digressions and to distinguish between expanding and elaborating/embedding relations within these. There is, therefore, an important point to be made with regard to the unit of analysis in both text analysis and comparative and typological research. In the case of text analysis, we would suggest that semantic units above the clause, such as Cloran's RUs, should be the basis for any analysis of textual progression. Moreover, as Theme performs different functions in conjunction with tonic placement and other textual devices, both within languages and between them, any analysis that focuses on sequences of clausal Themes alone will present a distorted picture at best. Furthermore, if the comparison is between texts from different languages (as in this paper), the analyses will diverge so far as to be incommensurate. In contrast, the supraclausal semantic work which textual devices perform in combination is more likely to be language-general, with the same destination being reached through divergent but nonetheless commensurable routes. And while these comments are relevant for comparing individual texts, they are particularly applicable to comparative and typological work which compares the number and placement of lexicogrammatical resources such as Theme across corpora in different languages. To emphasise the point: if Theme doesn't mean the same thing in different languages, then such a comparison is between apples and pears.

We will finish with two further points which take us back briefly to the question of universals in language. Firstly, in terms of the level of abstraction of universals, we would suggest that semantic features, such as the existence of rhetorical expansions and

elaborations/embeddings, are more likely to be universal properties of language than lexicogrammatical features, though less likely than metafunctional diversity as posited by Halliday. They are therefore a useful halfway house between these two levels of abstraction and as such they provide analysts with a motivated location for moving between the two. And secondly, in the analysis of parametric and hierarchical universals – particularly as they drift from the absolute to the statistical end of the cline – analysts might benefit from considering the overall characterologies of the languages under study and how these impact upon different structures and their interaction. This would allow for an explanation of the coexistence of features, rather than a simple correlation, so as to attend to the *problem of linkage* between linguistic constraints and the preferred structures in individual languages (Kirby 1999: 20). Such work would be further enhanced through textual rather than clausal analysis. It would also benefit from an approach that takes on board the competing pressures implied in the metafunctional, rather than simply propositional, characterisation of language, given that markedness often plays an important role in disrupting rather than facilitating the processes of interpretation.

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#### Additional glosses used

COP copular

EMPH emphatic

EXIST existential

IMPERS impersonal

INT interrogative particle

PRO pronominal

VN verbal noun

**Figure 1.** A Recount embedded in a Commentary

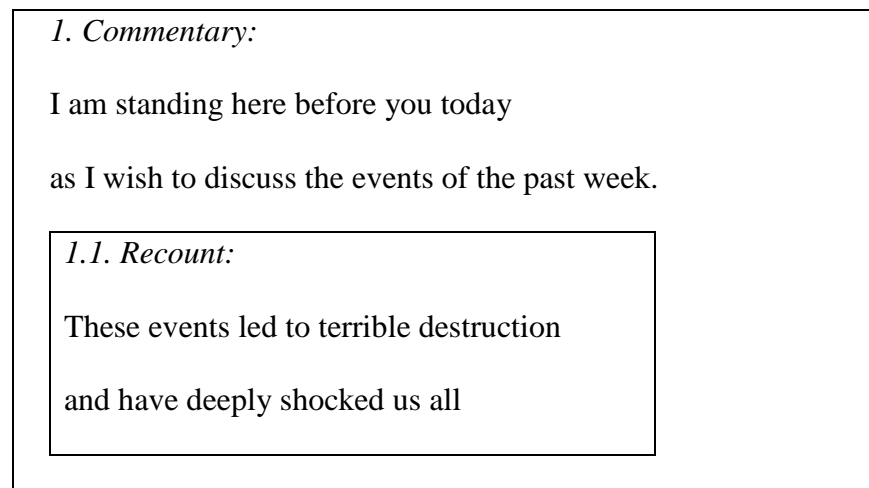


Figure 2. A Recount expanding on an Account

<p><i>1. Account:</i></p> <p>Spain is a beautiful country.</p> <p>It boasts a warm climate and a lively culture.</p>
<p><i>2. Recount:</i></p> <p>Many famous artists have lived in Spain over the years.</p>